DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 328 396 RC 017 995

AUTHOR Milstein, Mike; And Others
TITLE Preparing Educational Leaders for Rural School Districts: New Mexico's State-Wide Collaborative Approach.
PUB DATE Oct 90
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the University Council for Educational Administration (Pittsburgh, PA, October 1990). Type on several pages darkened by toner.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Education; Consortia; *Educational Administration; Educational Planning; Elementary Secondary Education; Graduate Study; Higher Education; *Intercollegiate Cooperation; *Leadership; Masters Programs; *Rural Schools; School Districts
IDENTIFIERS *Educational Leadership; *New Mexico

ABSTRACT

Educational administration faculty from five public higher education institutions in New Mexico formed a consortium to address the need for effective educational leaders in rural school districts. Members established the New Mexico Partners for Educational Leadership (PEL), composed of faculty from the five universities, leading educational administrators from New Mexico's rural school districts, selected school board members, and high-ranking officials from the State Department of Education. They developed the following strategies: (1) establishment of regional "pools" of rural school districts to facilitate the identification of potential leaders and provide supervision and subsequent placement; (2) development of a state-wide assessment center for selecting candidates of the preparation program; (3) professional development for preparation program faculty members; and (4) establishment of common standards for admissions and programmatic expectations across the five universities' preparation programs. During the next phase (1991-1992), faculty will deliver programs for candidates and establish cooperative arrangements for site supervision and placement in administrative positions. Concerns for the future are the cohesiveness of PEL, funding sources, availability of candidates, cooperation among university faculty, and support of school districts. (KS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED328396

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

PREPARING EDUCATIONAL LEADERS FOR RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS: NEW MEXICO'S STATE-WIDE COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

Mike Milstein

and

JoAnn Krueger
Department of Educational Administration
University of New Mexico

Nan Restine
Department of Educational Leadership
Western Kentucky University

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the
University Council for Educational Administration
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
October, 1990

CE 017995

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Nan Restine
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Preparing Educational Leaders for Rural School Districts: New Mexico's State-Wide, Collaborative Approach

Mike Milstein
JoAnn Kruger
Nan Restine

Our ability to respond to demands for educational reform is directly dependent upon the availability of effective educational leaders. Rural school districts are faced with a unique set of circumstances which makes this especially difficult to achieve. These circumstances include minimal availability of fiscal resources, small enrollments combined with large, sparsely populated areas, geographical isolation, and relatively few qualified candidates interested in competing for administrative positions.

Compounding the problem is the fact that for rural school districts the resources available for remediation of problemmatic situations are most frequently found in locales that are neither easily accessed or highly interested in the leadership needs of rural school districts. Comprehensive educational administration preparation programs are usually located in distant metropolitan centers, and they are usually preoccupied with

the large population that needs to be served in these areas. Those programs that are more accessible to rural school districts tend to be limited in academic offerings and small in numbers of faculty and field supervisors.

Given this situation, traditional approaches to preparation of educational administrators need to be re-examined and alternative approaches may need to be developed if we hope to be more responsive to rural school district leadership needs.

In New Mexico we have spent the past several years exploring alternative strategies for training and placing educational leaders for the state's rural school systems. The intent of the paper is to describe these strategies, which have the potential to positively affect the quantity and quality of educational leadership required for New Mexico's rural schools. Hopefully they may also be worthy of exploration in states with similar dynamics.

Background

New Mexico has five public higher education institutions engaged in the preparation of educational

administrators. Two are large and located in urban communities--New Mexico State University in Las Cruces and the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. Three are small and located in smaller communities--Western New Mexico University in Silver City, Eastern New Mexico University in Portales, and Highlands University in Las Vegas, New Mexico. Educational administration faculty from these institutions, meeting together since the fall of 1985, have been exploring ways of cooperating that could be mutually advantageous (e.g., students taking courses across institutions, cooperative teaching, cooperative professional development activities for practicing administrators and providing advisement to state-level policy makers).

In 1986 these units joined together to establish the New Mexico Educational Administration Consortium, a non-profit organization registered with the State of New Mexico. As a legal entity, the Consortium is able to conduct professional activities for the advancement of the field of educational administration in the State.

Consortium members soon came to realize that by working together they could have a have a major impact on the provision of effective leadership for the state's rural school districts. This realization has led to intensive

discussions and, subsequently, to the development of a proposal that was submitted to the Danforth Foundation.

The Danforth Rural School Leadership Project

The intent of the Danforth Foundation project is to support Consortium efforts to identify and help develop potential educational leaders for New Mexico's school districts. During phase one of this effort, Danforth funds have supported planning activities (during the 1989-1990 and 1990-1991 academic years). The expectation is that these activities will encourage a larger group of candidates to consider enrolling in Consortium members' preparation programs in future years.

Phase One: Planning

Results may be viewed in two phases. The first, which has been underway since the fall of 1989, has been aimed at the development of a broad-based community of educators to explore issues and develop a common set of implementation strategies.

The initial activity has been to establish a cooperative dialogue, across universities and between university faculty members and school administrators, about the leadership attributes that are most critically needed

for the foreseeable future among the state's rural school districts. Three day workshops were held during the fall of 1989 and the spring of 1990, to promote the sharing of concerns and ideas that could become part of a set of solution strategies. Equally important, these workshops helped to overcome misperceptions and mistrust, as members came together to work on Danforth projects.

At the end of the second workshop, members decided to establish a new organization, the New Mexico Partners for Educational Leadership (PEL), composed of faculty from the five universities, leading educational administrators from New Mexico's rural school districts, selected school board members, and high-ranking officials from the State Department of Education. This forum, the first of its kind in New Mexico, has provided a much needed structure to explore differences and seek understandings and agreements across diverse interest groups.

Strategies developed during Phase One include:

A. Establishment of regional "pools" of rural school districts to facilitate the identification of potential leaders and provide for their supervision and subsequent placement;

B. Development of a state-wide assessment center for selecton of preparation program candidates;

C. Professional development for preparation program faculty members; and

D. Establishment of common standards for admissions and programmatic expectations across the five universities' preparation programs.

During this phase the focus has been on 1) the development of policies and structures that are necessary to implement the above strategies; 2) creation of candidate pools; 3) identification of candidates with high leadership potential; and 4) enrollment of these candidates in educational administration preparation programs.

Phase Two: Implementation

This phase, which will commence in 1991-1992, will be the operational phase. It will include delivery of programs for candidates and the establishment of cooperative arrangements for site supervision and placement in administrative positions.

For these outcomes to be achieved we will have to develop agreed-upon strategies. First, we have to move away from the present dominant practice of passively waiting for candidates to identify themselves as they seek admissions to our programs. Instead we must aggressively recruit candidates with proven leadership qualities and with high potential to become good educational administrators.

Second, we must overcome our tendency to work in isolation rather than through partnerships of affected individuals and groups. We intend to cooperate, across universities and with field leaders, to develop approaches to state-wide identification of candidates with high potential for leadership. This recruitment should be based upon agreed-upon standards and criteria that involve field based administrators and school board members as well as university faculty members.

Third, we need to emphasize leadership activities in our academic programs, both on campus and through extensive and intensive field-site experiences. Continuing professional development for faculty members is required for this to occur.

Finally, we recognize the need to coordinate our limited fiscal and human resources for efficiency. In particular we need to coordinate the five universities' efforts so that it becomes feasible for candidates to avail themselves of the diverse strengths that exist in these programs. This includes coordination of standards and procedures for admissions, provision of agreed-upon academic content, cooperation in supervision of internship

activities, and sharing of information about candidate availability for position openings.

Hopes and Fears as We Move Ahead

We are cautiously optimistic as we prepare to move into the operational phase of the effort. We have taken giant strides to get as far as we have, but we are fully aware that moving from the planning to the operational phase successfully will probably entail threading ourselves carefully through a large minefield of constraints.

Questions We Need To Answer

1. Will the Partners for Educational Leadership (PEL) hold together? Thus far PEL is a novelty. Can it sustain itself? Given the very large platter of new ventures spinning off from restructuring efforts at the state and local level, competition for the attention of educational leaders will be sharp. Without the broad-based support that is presently represented in PEL, the effort could founder.

2. Will the funds necessary to support the preparation of potential educational administrators be forthcoming? Thus far school districts have been hesitant

to provide resources and sponsor candidates, most of whom can ill-afford to take time off or find the funds to support graduate training costs.

3. Will sufficient numbers of good candidates for rural school district leadership positions be available? We are not sure how many talented teachers with rural school experiences are anxious to move into administrative positions. It will, at the very least, require a concerted publicity effort on the part of the Consortium and PEL members to make potential candidates aware of the possibilities and the challenges that are available.

4. Will the five universities overcome past behaviors and be able to work together, over the long haul, in a cooperative and trusting manner? The Consortium has come a long way in the past few years, but we are on the threshold of a larger commitment to cooperate. Can that challenge be met successfully? Further only a few faculty members at these institutions have participated in the ongoing dialog. To what extent will their colleagues feel a commitment to the directions being taken?

5. Will school district and state education agency officials support the changes being proposed? School

districts across the state will need to cooperate in finding and placing candidates. The State Department of Education will need to play more substantive leadership role and less of a regulatory role. Funding to support internship supervision is needed. The support of these agencies is rcitical if the proposed changes are to survive.

Reasons For Hope

Not having answers to the above questions is disconcerting, but there is much reason to believe that they can be addressed successfully, given the factors noted below.

1. A real and deeply-felt need has been identified, a need that is recognized by all involved parties Consortium participants recognized a growing imbalance between leader preparation opportunities and the number of candidates being prepared in metropolitan and rural areas. In the past few years significant strides have been made in the development of meaningful internship programs in urban areas, where resources are more available. This improvement has made the already existing disparity betweem metropolitan and rural areas even greater. With the growing recognition of the imbalanced, a ground-swell of pressure is being felt to reduce the disparity by creating

alternative opportunities for candidates seeking positions as administrators in rural school districts.

2. There is a growing recognition of the symbiotic relationship between larger and smaller educational administration preparation programs. For the most part, because larger programs have more course options and supervisory capacity, small program personnel have tended to view larger programs as direct threats to their ability to attract students. For their part, personnel in larger programs have tended to view smaller programs as insufficient and have hesitated to allow students from these programs into theirs.

The dialog that has been conducted in the Consortium has helped to clarify ways that large and small programs can be supportive of each other, rather than in conflict with each other. For example, small programs can expand their capacity to serve students if they are able to tap into the more extensive human resources available through the larger programs. Large programs are typically based in metropolitan areas and would be hard pressed to meet, directly, the needs of students from rural areas

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

(especially in internship activities) if smaller programs were not available to serve this growing need. Together, each has capacities that can be supportive of the other.

3. Mistrust and misperceptions are being explored and replaced with a deep sense of joint mission. The coming together of school based, state-level, and university leading educators in PEL has created a safe forum to confront issues and beliefs that have kept these role groups apart, if not alienated from each other, in the past. The climate of the PEL meetings has changed significantly from the time it was first created to the present. Tentativeness and hidden agendas demarcated the tenor of meetings early-on, whereas goal-oriented, friendly behaviors are more representative of interactions now. There is a growing feeling that the time we have spent together and the commitments we have made to the effort will leave a lasting and positive effect on the level of cooperation among these role groups.

4. The availability of two years of "seed money" by the Danforth Foundation has created a positive potential for state and local resource commitments. New Mexico is a poor state. As such it often has difficulty

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

finding the resources to initiate exploration of untested ideas. However, with resources from Danforth, the forum for such an initiative has been made possible. Involvement by state and local influentials who are now committed to, and "own," the ideas, will enhance the probability that resources will be forthcoming, even if it means re-allocation of them.

Rural Leadership Needs and the New Mexico Approach

It would be over-stating the case to say that New Mexico's experiment should be applied in other states. After all, the effort is still in the planning stage. Equally important, the New Mexico approach has been designed to meet very specific local conditions. Conditions which exist in other states may be sufficiently different to require other strategies (e.g., rural/urban balance, number of higher education institutions, past experiences, dispositions of key actors, etc.). Clearly, grafting New Mexico's approach is not going to suffice.

Still there are some lessons from the process we have been going through that might be helpful to others contemplating similar efforts. First, the status quo must

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

be diagnosed carefully to establish the level of felt need and the willingness to risk change. Second, the need itself must be agreed-upon and stated clearly so that all parties know to what they are commiting themselves. Third, readiness must be determined; i.e., if the awareness of the problem is minimal and/or individuals are not able or willing to work together, some ground work must be done first. Fourth, start-up resources must be identified and secured so that people can be brought together to explore the issues and find the solutions. Finally, there must be a small but committed leadership cadre which has the vision to move others to serve in the cause, is capable of organizing activities and releasing the positive energies of participants, and has the tenacity to stay the course through the inevitable dark times that any new approach requires.